Impact of Approval of Bt. Cotton

4715. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have conducted any survey or study to know the impact since fhe approval by Genetic Engineering Approval Committee for commercial release of Bt. Cotton; and

(b) the steps taken by Government to clear the companies which come out with varities of Bt. cotton?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) accorded approval for cultivation of three Bt. cotton hybrids in March, 2002. The impact of cultivation of Bt. cotton will be known only after it has been cultivated.

(b) The companies which come out with varieties of Bt. cotton will have to comply with the provisions of Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/ genetically Engineered organisms or cells, 1989 notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Forests Guards

4716. SHRI CO. POULOSE: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the present number of forest guards is inadequate to protect the wild life;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the action taken to increase their strength;

(c) whether it is also a fact that in various areas, the forests guards are not being paid their salaries for many months; and

(d) if so. the details thereof and the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRi f.R. BALLU): (a) At present there are more than 2000 vacancies

of Forest Guards in the Wildlife Wing of various States. In certain State the percentage of vacancies is as high as 30%. Such a situation is not congenial to effective protection of wildlife and its habitat.

(b) Prime Minister of India has written a letter to the Chief Ministers of all the States to fill the vacant posts in the Forest Department on priority basis.

(c) and (d) Last year it was brought to the notice of the Ministry of Environment & Forests that the Forest Guards in Valmrk Tiger Reserve have not been paid their salary for several months. The matter was taken up with the State Government and the crises was not resolved.

Non-Availability of Bt. Cotton Seeds in Punjab

4717. SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that great uncertainty is prevailing amongst the farmers of Punjab over non-availability of genetically modified Bt. Cotton seeds during the current (April-May) sowing season in the State, as reported in the Tribune dated 11th April, 2002 (Punjabi Edition);

(b) whether it is a fact that scientists of I.C.A.R. have not been able so far to carry out final trial of suitability of above mentioned seeds in North Indian States, because of non-availability thereof to them; and

(c) if so, what is the present status of availability of Bt. Cotton seeds to farmers of Punjab and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONEMNT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (c) Out of the four Bt. cotton hybrids developed by Maharashtra Hybrid Seed Company (MAHYCO), the trials of MECH 915 vaiiety, which is more suitable for Northern States is one season behind the other three varieties because of its early sowing requirement. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research